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ABSTRACT

A study was initiated to answer questions concerning television programing during "people's time" in a medium-sized market. "People's time" is defined as local prime time from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. as contrasted with prime or network time and is considered a time when local broadcasters have an opportunity to serve their audience's nonentertainment needs. Content analysis was applied to the "TV Guide," and the findings indicated that: (1) six of the 21 program types identified accounted for 70.2% of the programing during people's time, (2) overall, no significant difference was found between three stations' program offerings, (3) of the total broadcast hours considered, 0.6% were identified as both "children" and "local public affairs," (4) "local news" comprised 10.6% of the aggregate content, and (5) nonentertainment programing, consisting of the sum of five program types, cumulatively accounted for 22.7% of people's time. (MKM)

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TELEVISION PROGRAMMING DURING "PEOPLE'S TIME"

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ABSTRACT

Recently former FCC commissioner Nicholas Johnson has stressed the importance of television programming during what he calls "people's time" or "local prime time": 4:00 to 8:00 p.m. In particular, he has argued that this time period (as contrasted with prime, or "network," time) offers local broadcasters an excellent opportunity to serve their audience's nonentertainment needs. Quite clearly, during these four hours one should expect to find growing numbers of individuals who have access to television. Specifically, school children and members of the daytime work force whose televiewing was necessarily precluded prior to these hours might be expected to tune in.

This study was initiated to answer the following questions regarding television programming during people's time in a medium-sized market: (1) Generally, what type (and frequency) of programs are broadcast?" (2) Overall, are there significant differences between stations' menus? More specifically, (3) how much and what proportion of time is devoted to children oriented programming? (4) What percentage of time is given to local news? (5) What percentage of time do broadcasters utilize for local public affairs programs? (6) What percentage of people's time consists of nonentertainment type programs?

Using content analysis methodology the findings presented here indicate that: (1) six of the 21 program-types identified

account for 70.2% of the programming during people's time, (2) overall, no significant difference was found between the three stations' program offerings, (3) of the total broadcast hours considered, 0.6% were identified as both Children and Local Public Affairs, (4) Local News comprised 10.6% of the aggregate content, and (5) nonentertainment programming, consisting of the sum of five program-types, cumulatively accounted for 22.7% of people's time.

TELEVISION PROGRAMMING DURING "PEOPLE'S TIME"

Recently former FCC commissioner Nicholas Johnson has stressed the importance of television programming during what he calls "people's time" or "local prime time": 4:00 to 8:00 p.m.[1] In particular, he has argued that this time period (as contrasted with prime, or "network," time) offers local broadcasters an excellent opportunity to serve their audience's nonentertainment needs. Quite clearly, during these four hours one should expect to find growing numbers of individuals who have access to television. Specifically, school children and members of the daytime workforce whose televiewing was necessarily precluded prior to these hours might be expected to tune in. Indeed, the Nielsen Television Index estimates of hour-by-hour television usage during all evenings for the two weeks ending 22 January 1978 reports steadily increasing percentages of U.S. households using television (from 58.2% at 6:00 p.m., peaking at 67.5% between 8 and 10:00 p.m., dropping to 61.4% between

10-11:00 p.m., and rapidly falling off after 11:00 p.m.)[2]

In the past, researchers have employed content analysis methodology as a means for discovering various aspects of television broadcasting. Brown[3] examined one week of Los Angeles television to ascertain the types of programs available to viewers in that market. Gardner[4] contrasted the program fare of American television to that of Japanese TV. Programming by group and non-group owned television broadcasters was studied by Baldridge.[5] Wirth and Wollert[6] analyzed public interest programming by multimedia-owned TV stations. Similarly, Austin[7] has focused on commercial network-affiliated stations' public interest programming during prime time. The present study offers a perspective different from the above insofar as the specific television content analyzed.

This study was initiated to answer the following questions regarding television programming during people's time in a medium-sized market: (1) Generally, what type (and frequency) of programs are broadcast? (2) Overall, are there significant differences between the stations' menus? More specifically, (3) how much and what proportion of time is devoted to children oriented programming? (4) What percentage of time is given to local news? (5) What percentage of time do broadcasters utilize for local public affairs programs? (6) What percentage of people's time consists of nonentertainment type programs?

METHODOLOGY

The study reported here examined television program listings during people's time on three commercial network-affiliated stations in a medium-sized market (Rochester, New York). All three stations transmit on the VHF band. Employing Johnson's definition, people's time encompasses the 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. time slot, Monday through Sunday inclusive. Hence, for each broadcaster 28 hours a week were considered. A total of 30 consecutive weeks were scrutinized for this study: Saturday, 31 December 1977 through and including Friday, 28 July 1978. For each affiliate, then, a total of 840 hours of program listings were analyzed (28 hours a week X 30 weeks).

Program listings were obtained from the Rochester edition of TV Guide. The "type" of program was coded according to TV Guide's content sidebar (e.g., Family Feud - Game). A 21-point program index resulted. In two instances (Miscellaneous/Other and Local Public Affairs) labels for the program-type were created by the author.[8] Patrick Murphy, TV Guide's Programming Editor, has explained that these program descriptors are arrived at by the magazine editors' "judgment and common industry acceptance of these terms."[9] For each program-type the number of hours scheduled by TV Guide were tallied (included in the tabulations were commercial minutes as well as actual program minutes; in other words, a show listed as beginning at 4:00 p.m. and ending at 5:00 p.m. was counted as one hour).

A distinct advantage to this methodology is standardization

of program categories thereby increasing the study's reliability (of the content coding procedure) and offering increased heuristic value to other researchers. For the content analyst, Holsti has noted that standardization is advantageous in that "results may be compared across studies and findings will tend to become cumulative."[10]

Finally, the actual content coding was performed by the author. One-third (ten weeks) of the universe (all days and hours) was randomly selected and re-coded by the author for the purpose of obtaining an intra-coder reliability estimate. The time interval between initial coding and recoding was 29 days. The percentage of agreement was 100%.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first question raised by this study concerned the type and frequency of programs broadcast during people's time in this market. In relation to the total number of broadcast hours examined (2,520), Table 1 displays individual broadcaster and total percentages for all three broadcasters for each program-type.

Table 1 About Here

Focusing just on the overall percentage column, six of the 21 most frequently (10% and above) appearing program-types account for 70.2% of the people's time programming: Comedy (14.5%),

Sports (13.2%), Discussion (11.6%), Local News (10.6%), Network News (10.3%), and Game (10.0%). Two of these six program-types, Local News and Network News, are coded simply as News by TV Guide but were separated for this study. However, if their cumulative percentages are summed, News programming becomes the dominant program-type (20.9%).

A further examination of these six most frequently appearing program-types by individual broadcaster allows us to note individual differences in their program menus. The CBS affiliate presented far more Comedy programming (33.5% as opposed to ABC's 1.3% and NBC's 8.9%) and the least Discussion and Game programming (none) when compared to the two other affiliates. Unique to WOKR (ABC) were Discussion programs (Dinah! and Mike Douglas) which were presented in quantities far above those by its competitors (34.4% versus none for WHEC and 0.4% for WROC). This affiliate also offered the least number of Comedy hours and the most Sports and Local News programming. NBC's affiliate also offered the least number of Comedy hours and the most Sports and Local News programming. NBC's affiliate, WROC, broadcast more hours of Game programs (143) and the least amount of Local News. Finally, rank ordering the program-types by broadcaster, a Friedman two-way analysis of variance test was performed. No significant difference ($p > .05$) between broadcasters by overall type of program resulted. There is no evidence, therefore, of one station significantly influencing the aggregate totals.

The third question this study sought to answer asked how

much time was devoted to children-oriented programming. While clearly any type of programming may be attractive, or even appropriate, to children, the criterion employed here was TV Guide's specific labelling of a program "Children." Referring again to Table 1, programs coded as Children are the second-to-last appearing type of the 21 program-types indexed. Cumulatively, only 15 such hours (or 0.6%) were broadcast. The distribution of hours between stations was fairly uniform: WOKR, 5; WHEC, 6; WROC, 4.

The percentage of time given to Local News was the fourth question posed. Local News was the fourth most frequently appearing program-type and accounted for 10.6% of the three broadcasters' programming. By affiliate, ABC presented the most Local News (102 hours or 12.1%), followed by CBS (90 hours or 10.7%), and NBC (75.5 hours or 9.0%). As indicated in Table 1, only the NBC affiliate broadcast more (7 hours) Network News than Local News. Further, for all three stations, the amount of Network News was nearly identical: 87.5 hours or 10.4% for ABC, 88.5 hours (10.5%) for CBS, and 82.5 hours (9.8%) for NBC. Adding Local plus Network News in order to determine the total news programming yields the following results: ABC, 189.5 hours (22.5%); CBS, 178.5 hours (21.2%); and NBC, 158 hours (18.8%).

The fifth question this study investigated was the percentage of time given to local public affairs programming. Overall, this program-type is third-to-last (15.5 hours or 0.6%)

in frequency of presentation (one-half an hour more than the Children category). The ABC affiliate accounts for virtually all the time given to this program-type (15 hours); on a regular weekly basis it programmed a one-half an hour show. The remainder of time (one-half hour) was presented by WHEC (CBS).

A final consideration of this study is that of overall nonentertainment programming. Johnson has intimated that local broadcasters utilize people's time as a forum for this type of programming. The distinction between entertainment and non-entertainment (or enlightenment), however, is especially hazy. "Certainly a great deal of incidental learning occurs during entertainment televiewing. The corresponding caveat, however, is that not all of this incidental learning has positive consequences."[11] For this study, nonentertainment programming was considered as the program-types labelled as Local News, Network News, News Magazine, Local Public Affairs, and Documentary. Summing the frequencies of these five program-types, as reported in Table 1, all three affiliates aired a total of 572.5 hours (or 22.7%) of nonentertainment programs. Of the three stations, CBS's outlet, WHEC, provided the most (209.5 or 24.9%) nonentertainment programming. ABC followed CBS as a close second (204.5 hours or 24.3%) and the NBC affiliate was a distant third (158.5 hours or 18.9%).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study presents a content analysis of the people's

time menu as served up by three commercial network-affiliated stations in a medium-sized market. The study is descriptive in that it determines the frequency of program-types in the specified content universe. The study is also exploratory insofar as this research serves to increase familiarity with program content during people's time. Moreover, the research suggests a standardized methodology for content analyzing television programming which could be easily replicated. Utilization of TV Guide's coding system provides for content classification in precise quantitative units and, importantly, ensures high reliability thereby avoiding the potential problem of impressionistic interpretation by different researchers. (The efficacy of TV Guide's coding is, of course, dependent on their own reliability.)

The findings presented here indicate that: (1) six of the 21 program-types identified account for 70.2% of the programming during people's time, (2) overall, no significant difference was found between the three stations' program offerings, (3) of the total broadcast hours considered, 0.6% were identified as both Children and Local Public Affairs, (4) Local News comprised 10.6% of the aggregate content, and (5) nonentertainment programming, consisting of the sum of five program-types, cumulatively accounted for 22.7% of people's time.

This study also suggests several heuristic aspects. First, how typical is this market? One might argue that the data reported here may be generalizable to other medium-sized markets

with similar number and type of television outlets. This, however, is speculative but makes a compelling point for future research. Second, how does the people's time menu of Public Broadcasting stations compare to those of commercial broadcasters? Lastly, are there program content differences between independent and network-affiliated broadcasters during people's time?

FOOTNOTES

[1]Interview with Nicholas Johnson, Rochester, New York, 6 October 1977.

[2]A.C. Nielsen Company, Nielsen Television Index, Nielsen National TV Ratings: 2nd January 1978 Report, 1978.

[3]James A. Brown, S.J., "Inventory of Television Programming in Los Angeles, April 30-May 6, 1960," University of Southern California, Los Angeles, June 1960. (Mimeographed.)

[4]Leroy W. Gardner, "A Content Analysis of Japanese and American Television," Journal of Broadcasting, 6: 45-52 (Winter 1962).

[5]Paul D. Baldridge, "Group and Non-Group Owner Programming: A Comparative Analysis," Journal of Broadcasting, 11: 125-30 (Spring 1967).

[6]Michael O. Wirth and James A. Wollert, "Public Interest Program Performance of Multimedia-Owned TV Stations," Journalism Quarterly, 53: 223-30 (Summer 1976).

[7]Bruce A. Austin, "Public Interest Programming by Commercial Network Affiliates," Journalism Quarterly 56 (Spring 1979): 87-91, 147; Bruce A. Austin, "Prime Time Television in a Medium-Sized Market: A Content Analysis," Communication Quarterly, in press.

[8]The following programs or program-types and their frequencies were coded under the Miscellaneous/Other heading: ABC, Candid Camera (15.0), Special (5.0), Western (3.0), Olympic Lottery (0.5), and Million Dollar Playoff (1.0); CBS, That's Hollywood (14.0), In Search Of (14.0), Festival of Lively Arts for Young

People (5.0), American Lifestyle (1.0); NBC, World of Disney (27.0), telethons (5.0), Quiz (1.5), Salute to St. Patrick (0.5).

[9]Telephone interview with Patrick Murphy, Philadelphia, Pa., 9 October 1978.

[10]Ole R. Holsti, Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969), p. 101.

[11]Austin, "Public Interest Programming by Commercial Network Affiliates," op. cit., p. 89.

TABLE 1

Time Devoted to Program-Type by Broadcaster

Program-Type	WOKR (ABC)		WHEC (CBS)		WROC (NBC)		Total Hours for each Program-Type	% of Program-Type by all Broadcasters
	hours	% of total time	hours	% of total time	hours	% of total time		
Comedy	10.5	1.3	281.0	33.5	74.5	8.9	366.0	14.5
Sports	136.5	16.3	113.0	13.5	83.5	9.9	333.0	13.2
Discussion	289.0	34.4	-----	----	3.0	.4	292.0	11.6
Local News[a]	102.0	12.1	90.0	10.7	75.5	9.0	267.5	10.6
Network News[a]	87.5	10.4	88.5	10.5	82.5	9.8	258.5	10.3
Game	108.5	12.9	-----	----	143.0	17.0	251.5	10.0
Adventure	-----	----	-----	----	145.0	17.3	145.0	5.8
Drama	1.5	.2	111.5	13.3	1.5	.2	114.5	4.5
Cartoon	-----	----	17.5	2.1	75.0	8.9	92.5	3.7
Miscellaneous/Other	24.5	2.9	34.0	4.0	34.0	4.0	92.5	3.7
Science Fiction	-----	----	65.5	7.8	-----	----	65.5	2.6
Movie	8.0	1.0	2.0	.2	41.5	4.9	51.5	2.0
Music	-----	----	-----	----	31.0	3.7	31.0	1.2
Variety	15.0	1.8	-----	----	14.5	1.7	29.5	1.2
News Magazine	-----	----	28.0	3.3	-----	----	28.0	1.1
Country Music	-----	----	-----	----	26.0	3.1	26.0	1.0
Mystery	22.0	2.6	-----	----	-----	----	22.0	.9
Crime Drama	15.0	1.8	-----	----	5.0	.6	20.0	.8
Local Public Affairs[b]	15.0	1.8	.5	.1	-----	----	15.5	.6
Children	5.0	.6	6.0	.7	4.0	.5	15.0	.6
Documentary	-----	----	2.5	.3	.5	.1	3.0	.1
Total	840.0	100.1[c]	840.0	100.0	840.0	100.0	2520.0	100.0

[a] TV Guide labels this program-type as "News."
[b] The author has created the label for this program-type.
[c] Percentage total does not equal 100 due to rounding.